

# Gay wedding: Kennewick council to vote on supporting Richland florist

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KENNEWICK, Wash. — The Kennewick City Council will consider a proposal to ask Washington's attorney general to drop its legal case against a Richland florist who refused to provide flowers for a gay wedding.

Mayor Steve Young agreed during Tuesday's workshop meeting to move the proposal, submitted by council member John Trumbo, to a future regular council meeting. The date it will be voted on hasn't been determined.

Roughly 75 people attended the workshop, many holding red crepe paper flowers and wearing stickers stating "Never Give Up."

While Young and other council members said they support the content of the proposal, they questioned whether the city should get involved.

"I support this completely, but I don't think it's my job in my ward to put those people in that position," said council member Bob Olson.

Trumbo introduced the resolution in early June. It uses wording developed by Joseph Backholm, executive director of the Family Policy Institute of Washington, in support of Barronelle Stutzman, the owner of Arlene's Flowers.

The Family Policy Institute is one of Stutzman's supporters, and Backholm has appealed to local government officials to support his resolution.

Pasco City Councilman Bob Hoffman proposed a similar resolution to his fellow city council members in early July.

The proposed resolution handed out by Trumbo and Hoffman states that "America is the land of opportunity" and "we are stronger because we are different."

It says the Kennewick and Pasco city councils should encourage a free market where the "government should not be forcing anyone to violate his or her religious beliefs in life and work."

A Benton County Superior Court judge ruled earlier this year that Stutzman broke the law when she told longtime customer Robert Ingersoll in March 2013 that she couldn't provide services for his wedding to partner Curt Freed because of her religious beliefs.

Stutzman is a Christian from the Southern Baptist tradition.

The couple and the state filed three separate lawsuits against Stutzman. Her attorneys recently filed appeal notices with the state Supreme Court to hear the case.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson issued a letter Tuesday responding to Trumbo's and Hoffman's proposed resolutions, saying they would not change his mind.

"A Washington business may not refuse service to customers on the basis of their sexual orientation," Ferguson said. "As Attorney General, it is my duty to enforce the laws of our state."

Stutzman was given opportunities to end the state's lawsuit by agreeing to not break the state's anti-discrimination law but has refused, Ferguson said. He encouraged the council members to have their councils instead draft resolutions affirming the rights of gay men and lesbian women to not be discriminated against by businesses.

Nothing in the resolution mentions Christianity or any other specific faith, Trumbo said, and any reading that says it supports discrimination is misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

The attorney general enforces the laws, but he does not make them, and that does not mean all laws are good, Trumbo added.

"There have been in our time many bad man-made laws," he said.

Along with Olson's concern about a council vote perhaps speaking for city residents who may not support the resolution, Young and council members Don Britain and Gregory Jones said the city didn't need to get involved.

The flower shop is not in city limits and the city had no part in drafting the state's anti-discrimination law, nor do city officials have an active role in enforcing it, they said. It would be better to have a signature petition drive and send its results to the attorney general or petition the legislature to change the law.

The matter also raised hackles. Young questioned Trumbo after Trumbo said a council vote to approve the resolution would speak for all the city's 78,000 residents, with Young questioning whether all in the city support it. Britain said he was bothered by a report from one committee that said if the council didn't support the resolution, it would be seen as un-Christian.

"I find that implication incredibly outrageous and, as a Christian, incredibly offensive," Britain said.

Council member Bob Parks said if the council didn't consider the resolution on the grounds that it wasn't in city limits, then the council would need to rein in support of other local initiatives, such as at the Hanford site.

Stutzman, her legal team and other supporters lauded the council's decision to consider Trumbo's proposal for a vote after the meeting.

"I opted out of participating in one event because I believe the Bible says marriage is between a man and a woman," Stutzman said during a press conference. "Wherever you stand on the issue of marriage, consider where you stand on the issue of freedom."